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A Warning against Schism.

A
SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH

OF SAINT MARY, SHREWSBURY,

BEFORE

Two Friendly Societies,

ON THE 29th OF MAY, 1799.

BY J. B. BLAKEWAY, M. A.

MINISTER OF THE SAID PARISH.

The fear of Man bridgeth a snare. Prov. xxix. 25.

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph. iv. 3.

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THE following Discourse is not submitted to the public eye on account of any opinion which the author, or his friends, entertained of its merit as a literary composition, to which it has no pretensions: but because he conceived that circumstances rendered it his duty to preach it, and because having preached it, he was willing to adopt the best means in his power to prevent misconception or misrepresentation of its contents. He thought also, that the attention, not only of his own congregation, but of all the friends of the established church in the town wherein he resides, required to be directed to the statement which he has made in it.

A SERMON, &c.

I PETER V. 8.

BE SOBER, BE VIGILANT.

WE are at present assembled to commemorate the restoration of our ancient constitution in church and state, after an interruption of twenty years, in the last century. Our ancestors, who had experienced in their own persons, the evils arising from the loss of those invaluable privileges conferred upon them by that constitution, doubtless celebrated this anniversary with due thankfulness and devotion. But we, their descendants, have been blessed with so uninterrupted an enjoyment of temporal happiness and tranquillity, that, I fear, we have long ceased to regard this day with the sentiments which it ought to excite.

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It is a fact not very creditable to the human heart, which some persons are so fond of extolling, that the season of affluence and prosperity is too often the season of forgetfulness and ingratitude. If we look for examples of devout attendance on divine worship, of veneration for sacred things, or of beneficence and charity, I doubt we shall not find the largest proportion of them among the great, the wealthy, or the powerful,—among those who have received so ample an abundance of worldly blessings, for which to return thanks, and with which to relieve the distresses of their indigent brethren. I fear, therefore, that the goodness of God in so long vouchsafing to bless us with public and private liberty, and the light of his gospel, under the protection of our excellent constitution, and *that*, while so many other nations have been deprived of both, has not been succeeded by adequate returns on our parts. *In our prosperity we have said, We shall never be removed*, without adding, with the Psalmist,^a *Then, O God, of thy goodness, hast made our hill so strong*: and still further has it been from stirring us up to shew forth our sense of the divine mercies, by an increased earnestness to walk in the way of his commandments, or by an increased attention to secure to ourselves the further enjoyment of those blessings.

Existing evils press upon us with so much greater a force, than those which have ceased to exist, that we are

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^a Psalm xxx. 6.

ever ready to conclude the age in which we live worse, in every respect, than any former period. I shall endeavour to avoid this common error, and to abstain from becoming the gloomy satirist of the present times. I even hope that in some respects we are better than our ancestors. In particular I think that the true principles of civil liberty and religious toleration were never better understood, or more cheerfully practised than at present ; at no period was there a more ready disposition to attend to the necessities of the poor, or greater alacrity, I speak from experience, to co-operate in affording them that instruction which is requisite for their well-being both here and hereafter — instruction which they could by no other means obtain. But I presume that I shall not be contradicted when I assert that the prevailing characteristic of these days is an indifference and negligence in religious concerns : men are either wholly careless on the subject, or if they do feel a due sense of the authority and precepts of the gospel, blush to own that they feel it.^b It is well if some of the toleration and liberality which I have mentioned, are not to be ascribed to this source.

God,

^b See an excellent Sermon against concealing our religion, by the Rev. ROBERT NARES. It is the tenth of a volume of Discourses preached at LINCOLN'S INN, and published by him in 1794. The whole collection is well worthy the attentive perusal of every gentleman of liberal education and serious reflection.

God, who has ordained that every vice should contain in itself the seeds of its own punishment, has provided that this our criminal ingratitude should not pass with impunity. The natural consequence of an indolence and supineness under the enjoyment of God's mercies, is a security and inactivity which too often end in the ruin of those who thus misapply the benefits heaped upon them.

Many are the individuals, and many the communities, which have passed with credit and reputation through the fiery ordeal of adversity, but who have been subdued and laid prostrate by the seductions and allurements of prosperity. I hope the Church of ENGLAND may not be reckoned among the number. Amidst the persecutions of two succeeding centuries she shone with the constancy and firmness of the primitive martyrs: *troubled on every side, but not distressed, — perplexed, but not in despair, — persecuted, but not forsaken, — cast down, but not destroyed.*^c Has her good conduct in prosperity been equally conspicuous? Has she borne her good fortune with gentleness and moderation? Has she maintained her vigilance and activity, or has she been lulled into a false and culpable security, by the repose which she has so long enjoyed?

Some of these questions we can, God be thanked, answer in the affirmative. The Church of ENGLAND, her enemies,

^c 2 Cor. iv. 9.

enemies will admit, is not a persecuting church. She requires, it is true, from those who are to wait upon her ordinances, an assurance that they approve of her discipline and doctrines, because she thinks, — and she apprehends that her opinion in this instance is corroborated by experience, — that without this caution, *the faith once delivered to the saints*^d would quickly be dissipated and lost.^e She maintains also her pretensions to a national establishment; because she knows that *those who wait at the altar should live by the altar*;^f and because she conceives that the cause of general Christianity will best be defended, the gospel interpreted, and its doctrines taught, by a set of men professionally attached to it,^g easy in their circumstances,

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ces,

^d Jude 3.

^e The tedious controversies between the advocates for, and opposers of, subscription must, I think, be decided by the previous question of their sentiments on the main doctrines of Christianity. A Socinian will naturally censure the adoption of a system which has been the means of retaining the Church of England in what he will call a radical error. But a Trinitarian, when he observes the fate of that doctrine in those churches which have not been protected by that fence from heretical pravity, must, if he is consistent with his principles, bless God, that we have, by any means, been preserved in the tenets of the primitive ages.

^f 1 Cor. ix. 13.

^g I think it is for the interests of religion in general, that there should

ces,^h unengaged in the daily pursuits and occupations of life, and should be *some* good pieces of preferment in the church, without cure of souls: as, by this means, some are enabled to enjoy that learned leisure which enables them to defend Christianity, to study biblical criticism, &c. from which the parochial clergy, if they are conscientious in the discharge of their functions, are almost necessarily incapacitated. I believe it will be found, in general, that those who have most ably defended and illustrated Christianity have either been persons who have held sinecures, or who have delegated the charge of their benefices to others. Not that I wish to confine the study of religion to the clergy, or that I am insensible to the great merit of such men as NEWTON, LOCKE, PASCAL, HALE, LYTTLTON, BARRINGTON, WEST, and many others; but I affirm that, for the most part, unless men are carried to the study by professional views, they will be too apt to neglect it.

And it seems to me a strong proof of the necessity of an establishment, and consequently that God intended there should be establishments, that learning, great learning, of the oriental, philological and Greek literature, is necessary to the due defence of Christianity.

^h Magnæ mentis opus, nec de lodece paranda
Sollicitæ. — — —

It is also of great use, in another point of view, that a clergyman should have a competence. When he is called into the houses of poverty and sickness, he will often find, that a judicious distribution of charity will dispose the minds of his hearers, more than any thing, to receive with readiness his religious instructions: nay, he will find himself, by such distribution, more animated and authorized to dilate on those topics. On the contrary, if he is himself poor, he will frequently

and independent of the caprice of their congregations.¹ But within these restrictions, which she looks upon to be necessary, — she is ready to allow to those who dissent from her the same

quently abstain from visiting such scenes, in order to spare himself the pain of seeing distress which he cannot alleviate.

¹ "What," says Mr. JENYNS, "would be the condition of any nation in which there was no religious establishment? No uniform mode of public worship could there be adopted; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor ministers maintained to perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and discordant multitude the majority of whom would chuse rather to have neither worship, churches, or ministers, than to incur the expenses which must attend them. Every man, who had any sense of religion would make one for himself; from whence innumerable sects would spring up, each of which would chuse a minister for themselves; who being dependent for subsistence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, must indulge their humours, submit to their passions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuse to be taught; and consequently none but the most ignorant and illiterate would undertake so mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and passions, and the instructions of such teachers, would split into as many sects and parties, divisions and subdivisions, as knavery and folly, artifice, absurdity, and enthusiasm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and supported with obstinacy by all the rest. This evidently demonstrates that some religious establishment must be annexed to every civil government."

Disquisitions on several Subjects, by SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

Disquis. viii. on Religious establishments.

same liberty of conscience which she has claimed for herself: and those persons will allow, if they are actuated by a spirit of candour and truth, that she *has* borne her good fortune with gentleness and moderation.

“ Has she, in the hour of prosperity, maintained her vigilance and activity; or has she yielded to the flattering suggestions of security and indolence?” On this momentous topick, it will best become the meanest of her sons to maintain a respectful silence. Yet may it be permitted me to observe, that if, in this instance, that has happened, which has been the case in so many other instances;—if prosperity has relaxed our vigour, and ease enfeebled our exertions,—there is no reason to hope that we should experience an exemption from those evil consequences which have generally resulted from the remissness and indolence engendered by security. If we have *slept*, there is no ground to hope, that our *enemies* will fail to seize the opportunity of *sowing their tares among the wheat*:^{*} if we have nodded upon our posts, there is reason to fear that they have been sufficiently alert in their attempts to surprize the garrison.

The Church of ENGLAND is not so sanguine as to expect an exemption from the common lot of having enemies:—

^{*} Matt. xiii. 25.

enemies : — enemies, different and even opposite in their tenets, their views, and their practices, unite — as heretofore they have united, in disapprobation of, and reflections upon, our establishment ; — and in their wishes, and in their endeavours, to take those steps, which are consequent upon such sentiments. It behoves us to be upon our guard equally against those whom we have left,¹ and against those who have left us.

It can be of little importance what I say, upon a subject of great, and even national, concern. If the friends of the Church of ENGLAND have indulged too fatal a repose, they will not be awakened by a voice so feeble as mine. To those, however, who are within the reach of that voice, I will say, “ while you are *vigilant*, BE SOBER.” By *soberness* upon this occasion, I would be understood to mean, discretion and sobriety of judgment. Indulge not the emotions of a blind and fanatic zeal : follow not the lead of an headlong enthusiasm, which will terminate in an unchristian intolerance and bigotry. The mind awake and prepared for real dangers is too apt to harbour a panic dread of imaginary ones : like those described by the psalmist, *who were afraid where no fear was.*^m I know no
D disposition

¹ See the Pursuits of Literature, *passim*.

^m Psalm lili. 3.

disposition of mind which requires more to be guarded against; being alike tormenting to the person who entertains it, and to those who are the objects of it. Yet tormenting as this unhappy passion is, so much do I *pray for the peace* of our *Jerusalem*,ⁿ that I should be truly glad to find that I was the victim of it, in the present instance.

My first admonition therefore would be—*Let your moderation be known unto all men.*^o Permit others to enjoy the same liberty of conscience which you would think your own due in their situation. Neither persecute nor insult them for being of a different opinion from those which you entertain: and seek not to exact an unjust retaliation, by leading the minds of the young and uninformed, in points wherein the fundamentals of religion have no concern, out of the paths in which they have been placed by their parents or elders.

But while you thus *study to be quiet*,^p and, *as much as lieth in you, to live peaceably with all men*,^q beware how you slide insensibly into that liberality, falsely so called, the opprobrium of the present age, the child of indifference, and the parent of scepticism, which leads us to think alike well, or rather alike ill, of all persuasions, and
all

ⁿ Psalm cxxii. 6. ^o Philip. iv. 5. ^p 1 Theff. iv. 11. ^q Rom. xii. 18.

all denominations.* Let those whose leisure and abilities qualify them for the task, *prove all things*, be it your parts to

* The writer had in his recollection a fine passage in the present bishop of WORCESTER's Life of his illustrious friend, the immortal WARBURTON. "He had an ardent love of Virtue, and the most sincere zeal for Religion; and that, the freest from all bigotry and all fanaticism, that I have ever known. He venerated the civil constitution of his country, and was warmly attached to the Church of England. Yet he was no party-man, and was the sincerest advocate for toleration. It was not his manner to court the good opinion of our Dissenters. But he had nothing of prejudice or ill-will towards them: he conversed familiarly with such of them as came in his way; and had even a friendship with some of their more noted ministers,* who did not then glory in Socinian impieties, or indulge themselves in rancorous invectives against the Established Church.

"I know, indeed, that he spoke his sense of men and things, occasionally, with a force, which in the language of some persons will be termed bigotry. And the truth is, *he never indulged his candour so far as to treat all opinions and all characters alike.* On the contrary, he held prophane and licentious writers to be fit objects of public reproof: and though civil penalties should not be applied to the coercion of mistaken, or even, to a certain degree, hurtful opinions, yet literary chastisement, he thought, should; an equal acceptance of *all* being the ready way TO INTRODUCE SCEPTICISM UNDER THE

"SPECIOUS,

* See a Collection of Letters to and from Dr. DODDRIDGE, of Northampton, published by T. STEDMAN, M. A. Vicar of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, 1799.

*hold fast to that which is good:** and be not ashamed to give your *testimony*† in its behalf:—remembering the observation of an apostle,‡ *that it is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing.*

My
“SPECIOUS NAME OF LIBERALITY, or rather irreligion itself, under the mask of charity. And if this zeal may be abused, as without doubt every thing may, at most he had only to answer for that abuse: the use itself being surely unquestionable, if there be truth or meaning in the Apostle’s aphorism, ‘That it is always good to be zealously affected in a good matter.’ But the reader, if he thinks fit, may see his own vindication of himself in the Apology for his View of Lord BOLINGBROKE’s Philosophy.” Thus far the Right Reverend Biographer.

And here the writer is tempted to transcribe some spirited lines on the same subject, from an admirable poem in the thirty-sixth, and (alas) the last number of that excellent work the ANTI-JACOBIN;—a work which has done more to influence the public sentiment than, perhaps, any publication since the days of SWIFT.

“Much may be said on both sides.” Hark! I hear
A well-known voice that murmurs in my ear—
The voice of CANDOUR—Hail! most solemn sage,
Thou driv’ling Virtue of this Moral Age,
Candour, which softens Party’s headlong rage,

Candour

* 1 Thess. v. 21.

† 2 Tim. i. 8.

‡ Gal. iv. 18.

My second admonition, therefore, would be to repeat the words of the text, — **BE VIGILANT.** We have a constitution in church and state for which it is well worth while to be watchful. The gallant **ARMENIAN** was justly deemed the first among his countrymen, because

Candour—which spares its foes—nor e'er descends
With bigot zeal to combat for its friends.

Candour—which loves, in see-saw strain, to tell
Of *aging* foolishly, but meaning well:

Too nice to praise by wholesale, or to blame, —
Convinc'd that all men's motives are the same;

And finds, with keen discriminating sight,

BLACK 's not so black, nor white so very white.

• • • • •

Give me th' avow'd, th' erect, the manly Foe;

Bold I can meet—perhaps may turn his blow;

But of all plagues, good Heav'n, thy wrath can send,

Save, save, oh save me from the Candid Friend.

I must make this long note a little longer, just to remark, that however specious this plea of liberality may be, it has the advantage of being no less prudent. Those who wage war *à l'outrance* with democracy and infidelity, have no retreat, in case (which God avert) they should be finally victorious; while those who pursue the *trimming* conduct here spoken of, though they may not be trusted or respected by either party, do yet enjoy the protection of the present government, and at the same time make to themselves friends of unrighteousness, that if we should fail, they may be received into what they may think more permanent habitations.

his rivals united in pronouncing him the second.^v Every denomination of christians is ready, in like manner, to assign the second station to the Church of ENGLAND, whence we may safely conclude to which rank it ought to be referred. If, however, the testimony of a friend in its behalf is questionable, we might add that of strangers and foreigners.^x But, without a long and useless deduction

^v It is related by PLUTARCH, of THEMISTOCLES, that after the battle of Salamis, when it was to be decided which person had signalized himself in the most conspicuous manner during the action, the other generals, though unwilling, through envy of his superior merit, to acknowledge it, adjudged the palm to him. For, upon their return to the Isthmus, when they gave their suffrages upon this subject, every one wrote his own name as the first in valour, and after himself THEMISTOCLES. Θειμιστοκλῆι, καὶ περ ΑΚΟΝΤΕΕ ΑΠΟ ΦΘΟΝΟΥ, τὸ πρῶτον ἀπέδωκεν ἅπαντες. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἀναχωρήσαντες εἰς τὸν Ἴσθμον, ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμῶ τῆς ψῆφου ἔφερον οἱ στρατηγοὶ, πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸν ἀπέβαινον ἀρετῇ, δεύτερον δὲ μετ' αὐτοῦ, Θειμιστοκλῆα.

^x The author was much gratified to find his sentiments upon this subject so exactly coincide with those of an able and interesting writer. His words, which had escaped me in the haste of composition, are too apposite not to be cited upon this occasion.

“ The Church of ENGLAND,” says he, “ besides the strong and “ irrefragable authority of the Scriptures in its favour, has this farther “ recommendation, almost peculiar to itself, that all parties differing “ from it concur in acknowledging that, next to their own, it is the “ best.

duction of authorities, thus much is certain, for we have it on the admission of those who would deny it if they could, that there is much, truly and intrinsically excellent, in our established church: as much of the primitive and apostolical model, as is consistent with the difference between an infant, and a mature, institution, is to be found herein; with much that is well calculated to excite and keep alive the genuine spirit of unaffected devotion.' The same may be said of our confi-

" best. It preserves an happy medium between the two extremes of
 " Popery and Presbyterianism; and is, therefore, incontestably the fittest
 " centre of union. And it is owing to her transcendent merit in this
 " point of view, as well as for other reasons, that the opposers of Pro-
 " testantism have always directed their attacks, not against Presbyterians,
 " and their particular doctrines, nor against any of our various sectarists,
 " and their various creeds, but against the Church of ENGLAND. But
 " (blessed be God!) founded on a rock, she has hitherto withstood, and
 " for the sake of our common Christianity, and the peace of the world,
 " we trust she will long continue to withstand all their efforts."

BOUCHER'S *Sermons on the American Revolution*, (Serm. II. on *Schisms and Sects*) — a volume replete with sound divinity, sober piety, manly sense, touching pathos, and extensive information.

Mr. BOUCHER adds various testimonies of foreign divines, stating the superiority of the Church of ENGLAND to every other.

' A remarkable instance of the excellence of our liturgy may be found in the Life of Bishop BULL; of whom we read, that during the interdiction

constitution in state, which unites the applauses of all who are not so far gone in the mad extremes of regal, or democratic, despotism; which affords all the security for freedom and prosperity, which is consistent with a state of civilised society: a constitution which the greatest men of antiquity declared to be of an unattainable ex-

interdiction of the Common Prayer Book in CROMWELL's time, he was sent for to baptize the child of a Dissenter in his parish. Upon this occasion he made use of the office of Baptism, as prescribed by the Church of ENGLAND, which he had got entirely by heart, and which he went through with so much readiness, gravity, and devotion, that the whole company were extremely affected; and notwithstanding that he used the sign of the cross, they were so ignorant of the offices of the Church, that they did not discover thereby that it was out of the Common Prayer. After the ceremony, the father of the child returned him a great many thanks, intimating, at the same time, with how much greater edification they prayed, who entirely depended upon the Spirit of God for his assistance in their *extempore* effusions, than those did who tied themselves up to premeditated forms; and that, if he had not made the sign of the cross, that badge of Popery, as he called it, nobody could have formed the least objection to his excellent prayers. Upon which Mr. BULL shewed him the office of baptism in the Liturgy, wherein was contained every prayer which he had offered up to God on that occasion; which, with the arguments offered by Mr. BULL in favour of the Common Prayer, so effectually wrought upon the good man and his whole family, that from that time they became constant attendants on the public service of the church.

Life of Bishop BULL, by ROBERT NELSON, Esq.

cellence,* and which may truly be termed **THE WONDER OF THE WORLD.**

*Meddle not, therefore, with them who are given to change.**

Our forefathers tried the experiment for twenty years, and bitterly they rued the attempt.^b *How bitterly, the*

F

solemnity

"Every nation," says TACITUS, "is governed either by the collective body of the people, or by a select body of nobility, or by a single person: a form of government composed out of these three, is easier to be praised in theory, than to be reduced to practice: and if it were once to take place, it could never continue for any long space of time." *Cunctas nationes et urbes populus, aut primores, aut singuli regunt. Delecta ex his & constituta reip: forma, laudari facilius quam evenire; vel si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest.* TACIT. ANNAL. iv. 33.

* Prov. xxiv. 21.

^b Lord CLARENDON has preserved a curious paper in the fifteenth book of his History of the Rebellion. It is an address from the Secretaries to Charles II during his exile, in which they forcibly contrast the prosperity which their country enjoyed under the regal government, with their then actual sufferings. It is too long for this place, and partial extracts from it would not be attended with that full conviction which will I think result from the perusal of the original. The following passages, however, will convey some idea of the whole.

"In what posture the affairs of these nations stood, before the noise of drums and trumpets disturbed the sweet harmony that was amongst us, is not unknown to your Majesty: that we were blest with a

"long

solemnity of this day may sufficiently declare. Resist, boldly resist,—yet with the forbearance which becomes your christian character,—those who whisper insinuations,

“ long peace, and together with it, with riches, wealth, plenty, and
 “ abundance of all things, the lovely companions and beautiful products
 “ of peace, must ever be acknowledged with thankfulness to God, the
 “ author of it, and with a grateful veneration of the memory of those
 “ princes, your father, and grandfather, by the propitious influence of
 “ whose care, and wisdom, we thus flourished.

Then, after stating the quarrel between the king and his parliament, they go on: —“ Upon this account, and to this, and no other end,
 “ were we at first invited to take up arms; and though we have too
 “ great cause to conclude from what we have since seen acted, that,
 “ *under those plausible, and gilded pretences of liberty and reformation, there*
 “ *were secretly managed the hellish designs of wicked, vile, and ambitious*
 “ *persons, &c.*

“ In all the rest of our motions ever since to this very day, we
 “ must confess, we have been wandering, deviating, and roving up and
 “ down, this way and that way, through all the dangerous, uncouth,
 “ and untrodden paths of phanatick and enthusiastick notions, till now at
 “ last, but too late, we find ourselves intricately and involved in so
 “ many windings, labyrinths, and meanders of knavery, that nothing
 “ but a divine clew of thread handed to us from heaven, can be sufficient to extricate us, and restore us.

“ How does England sit solitary? how is she become as a widow?
 “ she, that was great amongst the nations, and princess among the provinces,
 “ vices,

tions, or who audaciously vent malevolent calumnies, to the discredit of our national church, or who would seduce your attachment from it. Further, as parents, I exhort you to counteract their attempts to entice the rising generation into bye-paths, which neither they nor their fathers have trodden: and let no insidious and delusory promises of reward induce you to permit them to desert the church in which you have hitherto educated them; remembering that all change has a natural tendency to unhinge the principles and unsettle the practice; and that all those whose infant years now render them fit subjects for seduction, may, in time, themselves become the heads of families, and influence the principles and conduct of ages yet unborn. *Watch ye, therefore, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong, but let all your things be done in charity.**

Above all — shew forth the excellency of the church whereof you are members by superior heights of piety and integrity. It is related of the late king, that, to the

“vinces, how is she now become tributary? How are our bowels troubled? how are our hearts saddened? how are our souls afflicted, whilst we hear the groans, whilst we see the desolation of our dear country? it pitieth us, it pitieth us, that Sion should lie any longer in the dust.”

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

the lamentations of one of the bishops on the progress which the Dissenters made in acquiring proselytes, he calmly replied, *Our love them.* All modes of faith are barren and unprofitable which do not shew forth the fruits of the Spirit in a godly and a christian life. And our attachment to our established church will best be evinced by meekness, soberness, and temperance; by obedience to, and a strict observance of, the precepts of the gospel. Thus shall ye *walk honestly towards them which are without;*^a and thus, *with well-doing shall ye put to silence*^b the opposition and attacks of your adversaries. Having your conversation honest among them, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, improve the day of their visitation, and glorify their father which is in heaven.^c

^a 1 Thess. iv. 12.

^b 1 Pet. xi. 15.

^c id. 12.

THE END.

